



CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF HARRISON

Office of the Supervisor

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Dear Chairman Hansen and members of the Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee:

I am writing from Harrison Township, on the shores of Lake St. Clair. This beautiful lake helps to connect Lakes Huron and Erie, and serves as a major recreation destination for the Metro Detroit region. Lake St. Clair makes up only 0.4% of Michigan's Great Lakes surface area, yet Harrison Township marinas account for almost 5% of the total Great Lakes marinas in Michigan. I am writing to ask for your support in addressing a major threat to recreational boating in our area.

Recent years have seen declining water levels, now at record lows. As a result, funding for the dredging of harbors and channels has become a priority. However, the focus has been on state and municipal harbors. Private marinas have been excluded from the funding, even though private marinas harbor the majority of recreational vessels. Simply stated, without private marinas, the recreational boating industry would collapse. To complicate matters, many private marinas access the lake on channels which lie on state-owned bottomlands. Private financing can be very difficult to secure when the marina owner approaches a bank to borrow funds to make improvements on property that they do not own or control!

It is for this reason that I ask you to support legislation to help solve the problem. A revolving loan fund could be established for dredging channels and access points to the Great Lakes. This would help private marinas that cannot exist without these channels, and in turn help to maintain our recreational boating industry in Michigan. My interest in the problem is more than personal: Harrison Township has 29 commercial marinas, plus several waterfront condominium developments. Only 8 of these are lakefront marinas, yet they comprise 47% of the total value of ALL commercial land in our township. We have approximately 2200 commercial boat slips and a greater amount of residential boat slips that rely on these channels for lake access. A loss of lake access for these boat slips would result in a loss of property value that would destroy our local economy and all but guarantee municipal bankruptcy. I am sure this problem is similar for many municipalities on Lake St. Clair and around the Great Lakes.

I firmly believe that a revolving loan fund could solve the funding problem for dredging channels that serve private marinas. I am confident that such a fund could be created for a minimal cost. Solving the lake access problem would avoid a loss of property values and the potential collapse of the state's recreational boating industry. I appreciate your consideration of this proposal and trust you will make every effort to keep our waterways open to all.

Sincerely,

Kenneth J. Verkest
Supervisor